

## REGISTER OF HISTORIC KANSAS PLACES---COVER :ET

Name of Property Denison Christian Church 085-1310-0002Location Central Avenue  
(street and number)Denison  
(city, town, or vicinity location)Lots 141 & 143  
(legal description)Jackson  
(county)Owner of Property Holton Unified School District 336515 Pennsylvania Avenue  
(street and number)Holton (Jackson County), Kansas 66436  
(city, town, county)

## National Register status:

date approved for nomination to the National Register by Kansas Historic  
Sites Board of Review N/Adate entered in National Register N/A

Description: The Denison Christian Church (c. 1878) is a one-story, gable  
roofed, frame structure which stands on a rock foundation. The one-bay,  
gable front building is located on Denison's Main Street and faces east.  
If measures approximately 40' from north to south and 45' from east to  
west. The building's clapboarded sides are concluded with Doric cornerposts.  
A Doric door surround and a surmounting window provide definition to the  
facade. A non-original door stands in the entryway. Three windows pierce  
the north and south elevations. A door may have pierced the rear elevation  
at one time but now this wall is solid. A door does pierce the west end  
of the south elevation. Non-original materials cover the walls and ceiling  
in the building. Some pressed tin remnants are visible behind the fallen  
acoustic ceiling tile. One or two small storage rooms appear to have  
been built in the southwest corner of the building. The building appears  
to be structurally sound & maintains its overall integrity. The building  
was moved to its present location in 1889.

Significance See attached sheets.

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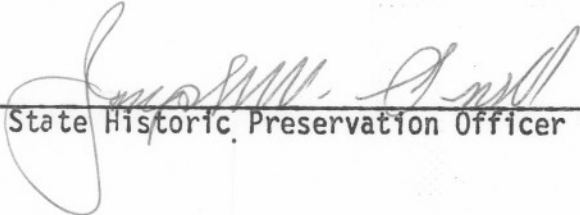
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Form prepared by Martha Hagedorn-Krass/Anna Pierson and  
Allen Gardiner (Sponsors) date October 8, 1987

This property was approved for listing in the Register of Historic Kansas Places by the  
Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review on November 7, 1987  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the Register of Historic Kansas Places.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State Historic Preservation Officer

November 7, 1987  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## THE DENISON CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The Christian Church at present-day Denison, Kansas, was organized in 1856 by John Trimble Gardiner, a member of a pioneer family which migrated from Platte County, Missouri, tempted primarily by the availability of pre-emption land as well as having made a commitment against slavery.

### Church Origins

The Christian Church, which traces its roots to four men educated for the Presbyterian ministry--Barton W. Stone, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and Walter Scott--was represented among the first influx of settlers in Kansas Territory with the appearance of Pardee Butler in 1855. The denomination began at the turn of the nineteenth century in Kentucky, and the first members represented an interesting mix of people who had broken away from Baptist and Presbyterian congregations, as well as other dissenters from established churches. "Disciples" or "Reformers," led by Campbell, and "Christians," led by Stone, united their forces in 1832 and rapidly grew in membership.

### Development of the church in Kansas

Pardee Butler, a Christian church preacher, settled on a claim twelve miles from Atchison, Kansas, near the present town of Farmington, and in June, 1855, he conducted a service to families in that neighborhood. This was the first service in Kansas conducted by a minister in this denomination.

The first congregation of Christians only in Kansas was organized at Mt. Pleasant in Atchison County, in July, 1855, by Duke Young, an elderly preacher. Another church was started in Leavenworth, also in 1855, and the first Christian church building in Kansas was erected there late that year.

The year 1856 saw the organization of two more congregations of the denomination, one in Lyon County under the direction of Solomon Brown, a farmer-preacher (it slightly pre-dated the city of Emporia), and the other on Cedar Creek [later Denison] by Rev. Gardiner.

In Personal Recollections of Pardee Butler (1889), we find:

Some twenty-five miles to the northwest of my place of residence, in what is now Jackson county, on the waters of the Cedar Creek, was a settlement mainly from Platte county, Mo. The best known of these was Bro. John Gardiner, whose heart now for thirty years has held one single thought, the interest and prosperity of the Christian Church. He has sacrificed much, has labored much, and has done a great deal of preaching without fee or reward . . . There also we organized a church.

Catherine Ann Cle Woods, who lived in the community at this time (long before there was any town) recalled in a newspaper interview:

Just west of [present] Main street a church was built with Par. D. [sic] Butler as the preacher. The church was built by plying 4 posts in the ground and covering them with brush. Sometimes it was built well enough to keep out the rain, but it was always a protection from the sun's rays. The church was built by John Gardiner.

Pardee Butler regarded the year 1858 as a turning point in Kansas. Many years later, in his published memoirs, he wrote:

In this year [1858] should be settled the question that had filled the territory with agitation, tumult and war for four years; and it was the year that our Kansas missionary work was begun, and in which was organized the first missionary Society.

At a convention held at Big Springs, August 9, 1860, twenty churches with 900 members were listed. Cedar Creek ranked twelfth with 30 members. That year was a time of a great evangelistic activity in Kansas. Pardee Butler was in the field as an evangelist; the American Society was providing financial support to G. W. Hutchinson, another evangelist; and other pioneer preachers were busy "sowing the seeds of the kingdom."

The Civil War years (1861-65) and the "grasshopper year" of 1874 provided considerable challenge to struggling churches, but the denomination succeeded with the help of field evangelists and continued strength of established congregations. The Christian church was a church largely of rural people and most of the congregations were small. In fact, in a "religious census" in 1875, the Christian church was not even mentioned, although records indicate there were about 100 churches in Kansas with about 4,250 members.

In 1875, this how the churches in Kansas stacked up:

	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>
Catholic	202	37,198
Methodists	621	22,696
Baptists	286	12,197
Presbyterian	207	7,962
Congregational	121	4,458
Christian [church records]	100	4,250

## John T. Gardiner

The Rev. John Trimble Gardiner, who organized the church at Denison, was the son of James Gardiner and Sarah Downs (Trimble) Gardiner, who were early disciples of the denomination. The obituary of a granddaughter, Susan Gardiner Overholser, who died in 1922, stated that she was a member of the Valley Falls Christian Church, "a denomination in which her parents and her grand parents were long identified, the latter joining one hundred years ago."

The Rev. Gardiner, who was also a farmer, carpenter, and pioneer teacher, settled on an 80-acre tract (purchased from Alexander W. Doniphan in 1858) just southwest of the present town of Denison. Following a brief sojourn in Leavenworth during the drought years of the 1850s and 1860, where he plied his trade as a carpenter, he relocated on a quarter-section north-east of the present Denison, which he had purchased by 1860. He was actively involved in the Underground Railroad during the Civil War years but there is no evidence that he served in the army or militia during this time. Although he was the original shepherd of the "Cedar Creek" flock, John Gardiner did not serve as pastor of the church on a continuing basis. He remained active in the church as well as in the denomination, however. In 1890 the local newspaper reported that "By request Rev. John Gardner [sic] has consented to deliver a sermon on 'Baptism' at the Christian church next Sabbath week, April 20, at 7:30 p.m. All denominations are cordially invited to attend." Another account, in 1892 states that "Elder J. T. Gardiner, of Denison" was among those "from abroad" who had attended the Christian Missionary Convention. He lived on his farm until his death, June 27, 1894.

## The church at Denison

In 1858 a town was begun about one mile west of the Gardiner farm and was named Tippinville after Welwood Tippin, a petty merchant there. The town was not actually registered until June 12, 1869, and contained about eight acres. The Christian church congregation held meetings at first in a log cabin on South Cedar Creek, about five miles south of Tippinville. Later a small church building was erected, but was never plastered or finished inside.

About 1861 the meeting place was moved to a log house which also served as the first school in the area, and was located near the present North Cedar Cemetery (one-half mile south of present Denison). In 1863 the congregation moved to a new log school house on the present site of Denison. In 1876 services were moved to a stone school building. In 1877 the North Cedar Church (as it was then called) had a membership of 70.

The population of Cedar Township, where Tippinville was located, was 795 in 1875, 973 in 1878, and 1,209 in 1880. In 1880 there were 42 residents of Tippinville, and about 80 in



1881. At that time the little town boasted two general stores, a millinery store, a wagon-shop, a shoe-shop, harness shop, two blacksmith shops, a cheese factory, and "three neat churches," the United Presbyterian, the Christian, and the Reformed Presbyterian.

In 1887, the Kansas City, Wyandotte, and Northwestern Railroad came through one mile south of Tippinville, and the little town was moved bodily to the railroad site, and became Denison, named for the Ohio hometown of one of the townsites owners, Hollis Tucker. The Christian church building was one of those moved to the new town.

On December 20, 1889, the Denison Star reported "The Christian church will be dedicated Sunday, December 22." On December 27, the paper reported that "Elder Martin, of Winchester, preached the dedication services at the Christian church last Sunday."

Although the church flourished for many years--membership had increased to 116 by 1905--during the Depression of the 1930s, the small congregation, along with its sister United Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal churches, found it difficult to support a minister. In 1937, the deacons and elders of the three denominations met together to discuss the future of the churches. It was decided to meet together, on a trial basis, to see if sharing a minister might solve the problems facing each denomination.

By 1955, the three denominations had met together successfully for 18 years and plans were made to unite the three churches. A committee consisting of Nelle Runkle Sorg [a granddaughter of Rev. John Trimble Gardiner], Lyle Siple, Jesse Patton, Roy Blumberg, John Porter, Ralph Eubanks, and the then pastor, Rev. George Brown, drew up a constitution. After a two-year revision period, it was adopted, and on January 5, 1958, the Denison Union Church was established. The "new" church has continued to hold services in the former Methodist Episcopal Church building ever since. Membership could be held in any of the three individual denominations or in the Union Church.

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Although the first little town in this area was known as Tippinville, the post office was established in 1867 under the name North Cedar, after the stream which runs through the area. On December 13, 1887, the name was changed to Denison, following the move of the post office to the new town. The names associated with the Christian church at Denison--Cedar Creek, North Cedar, South Cedar, Tippinville, and Denison--are synonymous in meaning.

## The Church Building

In 1878, John Gardiner, William Austin Dodson, and others built a frame church building of native lumber at Tippinville. According to an oral tradition in the Dodson family, John Gardiner bore most of the building expense himself.

The one story structure, which may have been patterned after the first Christian church building in Emporia, erected in 1859 (the buildings are almost identical in appearance except that the Emporia church had a belfry), has a central door at the east side entrance. There are three tall windows on both the north and south sides. The west side of the building consists of a raised platform and an enclosed antechamber. Obviously, the lectern/pulpit was located here and the area may have served as a choir loft as well. A baptistry which could be heated in winter is a part of the raised platform area. In December, 1889, the church building was moved to the new townsite where it still stands.

The Denison Christian Church building was sold to the Denison Rural High School [later Unified School District #337] in July, 1957. For many years the building served as the music room for both grade and high schools which stood nearby. (The old Denison Grade School building, erected in 1909, was razed in 1973. The high school building, of brick, erected in 1941, has been used as a grade school since 1970.)

The Christian church building has undergone very little alteration since its move to Denison 98 years ago. A lowered ceiling was installed after the building was used for school purposes to more efficiently heat the building. A door has been cut into the south side of the building.

## The People of the Community

When Pardee Butler stated that the Cedar Creek settlement had been made primarily by people from Platte Co., Mo., he knew whereof he spoke. There is some evidence that the first settlers on Cedar Creek came because of anti-slavery sentiments. In Kentucky, some of the Gardiner family had been slave-owners as late as 1824. There is no record of James Gardiner himself having owned slaves, and his opposition to it may well have triggered the family's removal to Missouri circa 1827. The Gardiners later migrated from Pike Co., Mo., to the Platte Purchase (the area that later became Clay and Platte counties) about 1837, and came to Kansas November 11, 1854.

The Alfred Dodson family migrated from Athens, Tenn. to the Platte Purchase in 1844. James Harding McAlexander and his family migrated from Platte Co., Mo. to the Denison area in the early days of settlement. Abraham Cline brought his family from Platte Co., Mo., to Kansas in 1855, and to the Denison area in 1857. J. Smith Saunders, a native of Kentucky, migrated from Missouri to Jackson Co. in 1860. James Renfro, a Virginian, lived in what is now known as Renfro Valley, Kentucky, and lived

in Platte Co., Mo., before bringing his family to the Denison area in the early days of settlement. Bainbridge H. Bradshaw, a native of Kentucky, noted as a breeder of Durham cattle and Norman horses, migrated from Vernon Co., Mo., to the Denison area in 1863, "owing to his Union sentiments."

Nearly all the early families were engaged in agricultural pursuits, and were self-sufficient, raising their own crops and livestock. The Rev. Gardiner was typical of most families of the area. In 1875, he had sown 5 acres of winter wheat, 60 of corn, 30 of oats, 1/2 each of Irish potatoes and sorghum, and 3 of millet. By way of comparison, ten years later, in 1885, he had 60 acres of winter wheat, 150 of corn, 30 of oats, 1/4 of Irish potatoes, 6 of flax, 300 bushels of corn on hand. The state census, which provides detail on every farming operation, shows that his livestock consisted of 9 horses, 4 cows, 15 cattle, and 24 swine, and his orchard contained 50 apple trees, 25 peach, 3 plum and 20 cherry trees.

In 1890, when the town was three years old, 69 car loads of shelled corn (46,575 bushels) were shipped out of Denison by rail in a six-week period. According to newspaper accounts, oats seems to have been the second leading crop in the area. Today, farming is still the primary occupation for people residing in the community. The principal cash crop is wheat, and there are numerous dairy farms in the area outside Denison.

Descendants of the earliest families in the community retain membership in the church to the present day. A 1965 history gives these names as among the earliest families to belong to the church at Denison: Artman, Brown, Christie, Cline, Coleman, Daniel, Dodson, Gardiner, Gilleece, Hale, Hedges, Hedrick, Hill, Housh, Humphrey, Kincaid, Lanning, Littleton, Lyons, McAlexander, McClarren, McDonald, McGregor, McReynolds, Mulanax, Oneal, Parker, Rawlings, Runkle, Shaw, Wing, and Woods.

John Stephen Artman operated a general store in Denison for a number of years. His daughter, Edith Artman Coleman, was president of the Denison State Bank from 1948 until 1964.

The name Bradshaw was omitted from the above list, but B. H. Bradshaw, is listed as the minister of the Denison Christian Church in 1863, according to files in the Kansas Christian Churches headquarters.

The patriarch of the Cline family, Abraham Cline, was a native of Wood Co., (West) Va., and a veteran of the Mexican-American War, where he served with the Santa Fe Battalion Mounted Volunteers. He came to Denison in 1857 from northwest Mo., re-enlisted in the army November 26, 1863 and died March 21, 1864, at the Army Post Hospital, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and is buried in the National Cemetery there. His wife, Alcy McVey, was of Scottish descent. Descendants still live in the community.



The first of the Coleman family at Denison was George Coleman. He and his wife, Elizabeth Voice, were natives of Sussex, England. They migrated from Canada to near Chicago, then to Jackson County, Kansas in July, 1855. A son, David, later had an interest in the grain elevator and was president of the Denison State Bank from 1930 until his death in 1936. He was succeeded as president by his son, Walter, daughter-in-law, Edith, and grandson, David, until the Coleman family sold their interest in the bank a few years ago. Many descendants of the Coleman family still reside in the community.

William Austin Dodson, who helped build the Denison Christian Church building, was born in Tennessee, and came to Kansas in 1863 with his parents. His wife, Mary Elizabeth Bradshaw, was a daughter of B. H. Bradshaw, an early minister of the Denison church. Dodson's father, "Squire" Alfred Dodson, was the postmaster at North Cedar from 1871-1873, as well as justice of the peace and notary public. The family had lived in Platte County, Mo., since 1844 before moving to Kansas. A sixth-generation descendant of Alfred Dodson, Daryl Dodson, has been actively involved with News Release Basketball (NRB). Sponsored by Christian Associates International, Inc., NRB includes college and post-college athletes, and coaches who invest their time with people in Europe, ministering to the athletes and students. Descendants of the Dodson family live in the community today.

Three sons and two daughters (the Runkle and Taylor families) of Rev. John Trimble Gardiner and his wife, Mary Jane Conaway, were members of the Christian church at Denison. One son, George W. Gardiner, later became an ordained minister in the church and served in pastorates in Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas. He also served as the choir director and in other lay capacities in the Denison church. George Gardiner's son, Raymond Gardiner, yet resides on the farm southwest of Denison purchased by J. T. Gardiner in 1858.

Benton B. Gilleece operated a general store in Denison for a number of years. The firm of Gilleece & Scott, Carpenters, was in operation in 1896. Descendants of the family reside in northeast Kansas.

A. V. Hedges was a school-teacher in Denison. His widow, Effie Saunders Hedges, a daughter of pioneer J. Smith Saunders, was the central telephone operator for a number of years before she moved her family to California. Other Hedges families remained in the area, and descendants live in Denison today.

Dr. Henry Hedrick was a local veterinarian for many years. He was born in (West) Virginia, grew up in Illinois, and came to Denison in its infancy. His wife, Harriet Lewton, grew up in Illinois also. Descendants reside in the county today.

R. W. Hill operated a general store in Denison at one time.

T. M. Housh migrated to Denison in 1895 and began operation of a blacksmith shop. Several generations of the Housh family are buried in the local cemeteries.

Charles P. Humphrey was one of the founders of the Denison State Bank in 1901, and was president of the bank from 1906 until his death in 1929. His wife, Alice Lewton, was a sister of Mrs. Henry Hedrick. Their son, Otis, was president in 1936-38. The Humphrey family migrated to Jackson County in the early days. Descendants of the family still reside in the county.

Joseph Lanning was the first president of the Denison State Bank, from 1901 until 1906.

Avery Littleton and his wife, Josephine Royse, were natives of Fleming County, Kentucky, and came to Denison in the 1880s. Mrs. Littleton operated a hotel in Denison for many years. They were closely related to the Lyons, McGregor and Rawlings families, all having migrated from Kentucky. Descendants of these families still live in the community.

James Harding McAlexander was one of the first settlers in the area. His son, Stephen, donated an acre of land to begin the first cemetery in the area (now known as North Cedar Cemetery, located just south of Denison). Descendants of the family still reside in Denison.

Samuel R. McDonald, and his wife, Mary Jane Warren, were also early settlers. Descendants through the Braum and Dodson families still reside in the area.

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ware* Miles E. Mulanax, a native of Ohio, came with his wife, Rachel, to Jackson County, prior to 1860. Lou Mulanax operated a blacksmith shop at Denison for many years. Descendants of the family still reside in Kansas. Dr. Alvin Mulanax, who grew up at Denison, was a long-time professor at Kansas State University.

Madison Woods, a native of Clay Co., Mo., and his wife, Martha Ann Hamon, came to Kansas, in April, 1857. A son, William Woods, owned and operated the Denison Harness and Saddle Shop for many years. Madison Woods' granddaughter, Cora Maude Woods Hickman, well-known for quilt-making, lived in Denison and died in her 99th year. Descendants of the family still live in Denison and in the county.

Descendants of the other families mentioned in the 1965 history may yet reside in northeast Kansas, but they have not been satisfactorily traced at this time. Certainly these names are well-represented among the headstones in the area cemeteries and figure largely in high school annuals and in the area newspapers of the first half of the twentieth century.

## Historical Significance

There can be little doubt that the Christian church is of historical significance in Denison.

From an historical perspective, we note that the church at Denison was among the very first of any denomination organized in Kansas. No research has been undertaken to indicate whether the first families to settle in the area were affiliated with this denomination or any denomination prior to coming to Kansas. Likewise, while there is no way of measuring the import of religion to the first settlers, most historians would agree that the church served an important spiritual need in helping the pioneers survive against overwhelming odds in a new land. Furthermore, while we have no record of whether the pioneer settlers at Denison might have joined other denominations had there been established churches in the area, we may note that the Denison Christian Church was the only established church in that part of Jackson County from 1856 until 1871, when the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter) Church was organized by the Rev. J. S. T. Milligan and several families which moved to Kansas from Michigan.

These churches stood alone in the community for many years. The United Presbyterian congregation was not organized until 1880, in Tiptonville, and the Methodist Episcopal Church was not chartered until July 8, 1889, after Denison had been established.

Secondly, in terms of historical perspective, the church at Denison had as ministers during its infant years some of the great names of the Christian church in Kansas. Pardee Butler, the pioneer preacher extraordinaire, is listed as minister of the Denison church in 1858. J. B. McCleery, who served many churches in Kansas until his death in 1903, was minister in 1867. J. H. Bauserman, one of "the big five of the Kansas pioneers" [of the Christian church] was minister in 1889.

Third, the continuation of the church through years of drought and plague ("the grasshopper years") indicate its role as an important social, and perhaps cultural, institution in the community. The church played an important role in the moral development of the residents of the community, and descendants of the first families in Denison retain membership in this denomination to the present day.

The fact that the denomination in Denison had increased to 116 by 1905, at a time when the town's population was 300, serves to illustrate the importance of the church in that community. Denison is a community where religion has always played an important part in the social fabric. Besides the three merged denominations, the Reformed Presbyterian Church (established in 1871) still has an active congregation. Members of the latter denomination descend almost entirely from the original families which settled the church. Many of the first members were Scots or Scots-Irish, having migrated from Ulster. The tenets of that

religion--not using music in worship services and in opposition to dancing--have had a strong influence in school events and in community events involving both churches to the present time.

### Architectural Significance

The building itself is of interest. First, the design may have been common for that time, but if so, it must surely be one of few examples left standing. Second, the building pre-dates the town by nine years, and is among of perhaps three non-residence buildings which were moved from the town of Tiptonville to the Denison townsite. (The United Presbyterian Church building, located one block south of the Christian Church building, is still standing but was converted into a residence in the 1960s. A blacksmith shop moved from Tiptonville by the Chestnut family is still standing at the south end of Main Street.) Third, the exterior of the building has been virtually unaltered in the past century, and no major changes have occurred to the interior beyond lowering the ceiling.

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